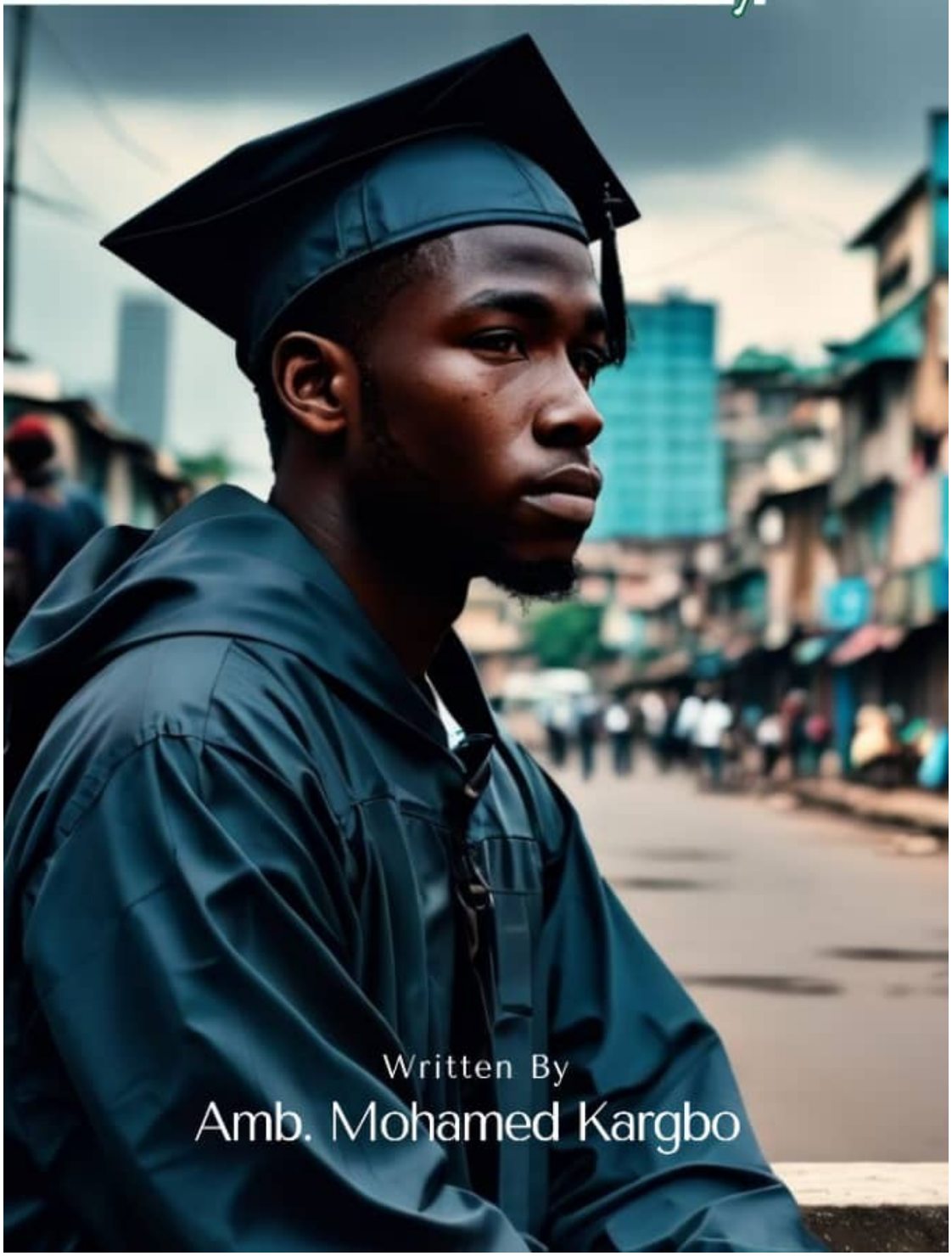
LIFE AFTER UNIVERSITY IN SIERRA LEONE

A nonfiction short story



Written By

Amb. Mohamed Kargbo

ABOUT THE WRITER

Mohamed Kargbo, born on November 25, 1999, in Macothe Village, Mambolo Chiefdom, Kambia District, is a Sierra Leonean young writer, feminist, youth advocate, and political analyst. He grew up in Tombodu Town, Kono District, where he began his educational journey at the Ansarul Islamic Primary School. After completing his National Primary School Examination (N.P.S.E), he attended the Ahmadiyya Nusrat Jahan Junior Secondary School and later sat for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E).

Due to the academic challenges faced by the pupils in Kono District at that time, Mohamed Kargbo relocated to Makeni City, where he enrolled at the Alhadi Islamic Senior Secondary School and successfully completed the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (W.S.S.C.E).

In 2019, he attempted the perilous migration journey to Europe, commonly known as the “temple run,” but eventually returned to Sierra Leone to continue his education. In 2021, he enrolled at the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST), where he pursued Political Science and graduated in 2024 with first-class honors. During his studies, he served as Secretary-General of the Students' Union Government for four consecutive years.

Beyond academics, Mohamed Kargbo has held notable leadership roles. He served as Secretary North for the National Union of Sierra Leone Students -NUSS (2022–2023), Secretary-General of the Kono Students’ Union at the EBKUST (2022/2023), and Bombali District Coordinator for Corruption Watch Organization Sierra Leone. He has also volunteered with organizations such as Africa Students for Liberty, Women and Children Aid Sierra Leone, and Chernoh in Action for Youth Affairs.

As the founder and CEO of the Students and Youth Advocacy Network Sierra Leone, Mohamed Kargbo focuses on amplifying the voices of vulnerable youth and students across Sierra Leone. His advocacy work includes organizing mentorship programs, spearheading media campaigns, and engaging in stakeholder dialogues on youth empowerment and employment opportunities.

He is passionate about education, with a particular interest in advocacy. Recognized as a feminist and a dedicated youth advocate, Mohamed Kargbo continues to contribute to national development through leadership, activism, and mentorship.

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Life After University in Sierra Leone

Once upon a time in the serene Macothe Village, nestled in the Mambolo Chiefdom of Kambia District, a young boy named Mohamed Kargbo was born into a family of four. As the second eldest son of Musa Lamin Kargbo and Mariatu Bangura, he observed the struggles his family faced. Life was far from easy; the specter of starvation loomed large during their formative years. In search of a better future, his father made the brave decision to migrate the family to Kono District, Tombodu Town, when Mohamed was just eight years old.

In Kono, Mohamed embraced his education with fervor. He completed his primary and secondary schooling, ultimately enrolling in Alhadi Islamic Senior Secondary School Makeni for his senior secondary education. However, as the pressures of adulthood loomed, he made the perilous choice to pursue what many of his peers believed to be the ultimate escape: illegal migration to Europe. In 2019, he journeyed to Guinea with the hope of a better life, but after a year of hardship and reflection, he realized that the pursuit of knowledge was his true calling.

In a moment of vulnerability mixed with resolve, he decided to return to Sierra Leone, persuaded by the camaraderie of his cousin named Osman Sheikh Bangura who yearned to go back home, in Sierra Leone **"Mohamed make wi return back nar wi kontri en go learn book".** In 2020, equipped with the necessary academic requirements, Mohamed enrolled at the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology Makeni Campus to pursue a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science.

University life was a whirlwind of opportunities, challenges, and new friendships. Mohamed was introduced to the Status Quo Family, a fraternity promising networking, leadership, mentorship, and academic support. The allure of belonging and opportunity was irresistible, and soon after initiation, he found himself appointed as the acting Secretary General of the Students' Union Government, a position of influence and responsibility that he embraced with dedication.

As he navigated university life, Mohamed cultivated friendships with vibrant individuals like Boyz, Ansu, Big Boy, Martha Marie, Dalinda, Gibo, Sullay Neneh Barrie, Alpha, Jessie, Samura, Hamid, Fatu Kyla Kandeh, and many others. Together, they formed a close-knit bond that thrived on mutual support and encouragement. Mohamed poured his energy into academics, achieving excellent grades and earning the trust of his peers

repeatedly as he served as Secretary General for the Students' Union Government for four consecutive academic years.

After four fulfilling years, Mohamed graduated with a first-class degree in Political Science, his heart swelling with pride as he donned his cap and gown. However, the excitement of graduation quickly translated into a harsh reality. Stepping into the corporate world, Mohamed faced a daunting challenge: despite his leadership skills and academic prowess, job opportunities seemed shrouded in darkness. Each rejection letter that arrived felt like a blow to his spirit, and frustration set in deep.

He wandered through the streets of Kono, Makeni, and Freetown reflecting on the sacrifices made and the hardships endured. The vision of the future he once held bright with potential and promise now seemed shrouded in despair. Nights turned into endless thoughts about whether his decision to return to Sierra Leone and pursue education had been a miscalculation.

But within this turmoil, Mohamed began to remember those early lessons from his rigid upbringing. He recalled his father's steadfast resolve and the resilience he had witnessed in his mother. Inspired by their strength, he realized that education gives you tools, but it does not build your future for you.

With newfound determination, he decided to take a different path. Instead of waiting passively for opportunities, he became an advocate for unemployed graduates, leveraging his network from university to create awareness that connected job seekers with potential employers. He authored articles about the challenges of youth unemployment, igniting conversations about reform and innovation in Sierra Leone.

Mohamed's journey may have taken unexpected turns, but through his efforts, he became a beacon of hope for those who faced similar struggles. While life after university did not unfold as he had once imagined, Mohamed Kargbo learned to embrace the challenge as an opportunity for growth, transformation, and a chance to make a difference in Sierra Leone.

And so, the tale of Mohamed Kargbo becomes one of resilience, a reminder that while the road may be rocky, the destination is not merely defined by a job title but by the impact one has on the lives of others.

Literature Review/Analysis of "Life After University in Sierra Leone"

1. Themes

- Resilience and Determination: The story showcases Mohamed's journey from hardship to educational success, highlighting the theme of resilience. His struggle and eventual decision to return to Sierra Leone reflect the

idea that education can empower individuals to overcome challenges, even when the outcomes are unpredictable.

- The Harsh Reality of Youth Unemployment: A prominent theme is the stark contrast between educational achievement and job market opportunities. Despite graduating with a first-class degree, Mohamed faces the frustrating reality of unemployment, which mirrors the experiences of many young graduates in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

- Cultural Identity and Belonging: Mohamed's journey touches on the themes of identity and belonging, especially when he enters the fraternity and finds a sense of love. His experiences reflect the importance of social networks in navigating the challenges of post-university life.

2. Character Development

- Mohamed Kargbo: The protagonist's character arc is significant, transitioning from a hopeful student eager to escape his circumstances through migration, to a determined advocate for change in his country. His growth embodies the struggle of many young individuals facing systemic challenges in post-colonial contexts.

- Supporting Characters: Characters such as his father and cousin represent familial support and the broader societal challenges faced by aspiring youth. The fraternity members symbolize friendship and collaboration, illustrating the importance of social ties in personal development.

3. Cultural Context

- The story is deeply rooted in the socio-economic realities of Sierra Leone. It addresses issues such as educational disparities, the impact of migration, and the frustrations of unemployment. The cultural backdrop informs the characters' motivations and actions, providing a nuanced understanding of life in Sierra Leone.

- The narrative highlights the impact of civil war and economic strife on individuals' aspirations, reflecting the historical context that continues to shape Sierra Leonean society.

4. Narrative Style

- First-Person Perspective: The use of a first-person narrative creates an intimate connection between the reader and Mohamed's experiences, allowing for an emotional immersion into his thoughts and struggles.

- Descriptive Language: Vivid descriptions of both despair and hope enhance the emotional depth of the story. The narrative effectively paints a picture of the protagonist's internal conflicts and external challenges, helping readers to empathize with his journey.

5. Symbolism

- Migration: The journey to Guinea symbolizes the search for opportunity and the lengths to which individuals will go to improve their situation. It also reflects the risks associated with such pursuits.

- Education: Education in the story serves as both a beacon of hope and a source of frustration. It symbolizes empowerment but also highlights the gap between academic success and practical job opportunities.

6. Social Commentary

- The story critiques systemic issues that plague the Sierra Leonean labor market, such as inadequate job opportunities for graduates. It invites readers to reflect on broader societal responsibilities toward youth empowerment and economic development.

Takeaway, "Life After University in Sierra Leone" by Mohamed Kargbo is rich with themes that resonate with many young individuals facing the complexities of post-university life. Through character development, cultural representation, and a poignant narrative style, the story effectively explores resilience, identity, and the pressing issue of unemployment in Sierra Leone. It serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of education and the need for systemic change to support the aspirations of the youth.